

March 2, 2011

County adds fee for court facilitator

Overloaded program helps with family law

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The Spokesman-Review

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Spokane County commissioners established a \$25-per-session fee Tuesday for a court program that helps people file their own divorce cases.

Commissioners said court officials requested the fee so they could add capacity to the overloaded "courthouse facilitator" program.

The fee, authorized by state law, takes effect on Monday. It applies to each 20-minute session after the first, which remains free.

A reduction to \$10 per visit is available to people who are receiving various forms of public assistance. Judges may authorize other discounts on a case-by-case basis.

The courthouse facilitator program offers information, but not legal advice, on family law procedures such as divorce petitions, legal separations, child custody hearings and determination of paternity.

Court officials say that, because of a reduction in free legal service programs, more than half of the family law cases in the county involve a litigant who doesn't have a lawyer.

The court facilitator program is subsidized with a \$20 surcharge on the Superior Court fee for filing documents.

In other business Tuesday, commissioners reduced hotel-motel tax distributions to the Spokane Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Spokane Regional Sports Commission because last year's receipts fell short of estimates.

The convention bureau's allocation from 2010 collections was reduced from \$1.9 million to less than \$1.7 million; the sports commission's went from \$525,000 to \$467,257.

Separately, commissioners renewed the sports commission's contract for promotional services paid with a car-rental tax. The commission is to receive up to \$180,000 for 2010 and then \$200,000 a year through 2014.